

The Revolutionary Process Today: Science and Doctrine

By Lenny Brody

As the crisis of international capitalism continues to develop, and a growing number of countries enter into political crisis, revolutionaries around the world turn to the body of knowledge known as Marxism for guidance in the fight of the working class. However, the confusion and merger of various aspects of Marxism has led to a disorientation of many revolutionaries. Some “Marxists” live in a world of abstractions, with little connection to the revolutionary process. Other “Marxists” run after every protest and expression of the “class struggle” without any strategic conception of the general motion and goals of the revolutionary process.

Historical Materialism and Doctrine

Marxist philosophy is dialectical materialism. When the dialectical materialist method is applied to the study of society the result is the science of society known as historical materialism. Marxist science, historical materialism is distinct from Marxist doctrine. Much of what was written by Marx, Engels, Lenin and others fall under the category of doctrine. Doctrine is a set of principles and policies that are applicable to a specific period of the revolutionary process. Doctrine is based on and flows from the scientific understanding of how societies develop and change.

Marx and Engels in the 1800s

Marx and Engels wrote during the transition from agricultural society to a society based on industrial production. This was a period of a rising bourgeoisie and a rising industrial working class and a poor peasantry that were all in struggle against a feudal political structure. It was also the beginning of the struggle of the working class against the capitalist class. Thus much of the writings of Marx and Engels can be seen as the doctrine of the class struggle for that period. These were the principles for the preparation of the working class to carry the revolution past the

seizure of political power by the capitalist class and on to political power in the hands of the workers. These writings also addressed the tactical and organizational implications of those principles. Marx in the “Address to the Communist League” spelled out much of the principal doctrine for this period.

Lenin in the early 1900s

Similarly, Lenin and the Russian revolutionaries faced a society in transition from agriculture society to a society based on industrial production. In addition, the growing internationalization of capitalism led to developing doctrine for the period of imperialism. One of the central features of imperialism was the territorial division of the world among the major capitalist powers and the fight against direct colonialism. During this period large sections of the working class in these capitalist countries were “bribed” into acquiescence by the profits from the super exploitation of the colonies. Thus the role of revolutionaries in those countries was mainly one of preparation and cadre development. In the colonies revolutionaries emerged as leaders of the national liberation struggles that dominated the international revolutionary process during this period.

Capitalism Today

The fundamental features of capitalism that Lenin laid out in his book “Imperialism” do not reflect the realities of capitalism today. The transformation of economic life from industrial production to production based on electronics, robots, big data, artificial intelligence, etc., is leading to social upheavals around the world. Mainstream economics and literature are flooded with books on how rapidly jobs are being eliminated. This is increasingly no longer a controversial question. These qualitatively new methods of production are in the early stages of eliminating labor from production. The basis of capitalism, the exploitation of labor in the process of production, is being destroyed. It is becoming clear that economies of scarcity, the foundation for private property, are being transformed into a global economy of potential abundance.

Abundance produced by electronic technology applied to the production process is

leading to conditions that undermine the possibility of any form of private property. Objective conditions have forced society into a leap toward a new stage of human history. This leap is not simply a leap from one form of private property to another. It is comparable to the leap out of primitive communism, the stage of society of hunters and gatherers, who held in common what little the community was able to get to survive. History since then has been of scarcity and the appropriation of the surplus society was able to produce into the hands of a minority of society. Today we face the need to fight for a society based on abundance and distribution according to need, communism. Thus we see the historical sweep that the science of society lays out. The motion from primitive communism, the common sharing under conditions of extreme scarcity, through various stages of private appropriation of the limited surplus produced by society and continued scarcity, toward a communist organization of a sustainable economy, under conditions of cooperation, abundance and freedom for all.

This is the conclusion of historical materialism, the science of how societies change and develop. Revolutionaries now face the questions of developing doctrine for the revolutionary process under these new conditions.

Doctrine for the Revolutionary Process Today

Doctrine is not a subjective choice. Doctrine evolves and is transformed because the objective material conditions of society evolve and are transformed.

The Working Class

What is the situation, the conditions that the working class finds itself in during this leap, this transition? It is clear that the working class has been undergoing a qualitative transformation. The working class is made up of all those who own no productive, value producing private property. The new methods of production are leading to a massive surplus population at the global level. These technological developments are impacting all sectors of the working class. Large sectors of the so called “middle strata” of the working class are finding themselves without stable

employment. Although some workers, on occasion, work directly for capitalists, the working class is increasingly finding itself peripheral to the capitalist system of production. They no longer have any ongoing relations to production. These workers are temporary, contract workers, day laborers, and part-time workers. They move in and out of employment and are being pushed towards the informal underground economy and permanent unemployment. Marx in the German Ideology hints at this future when he states, "the communistic revolution ... is carried through by the class which no longer counts as a class in society, is not recognized as a class, and is in itself the expression of the dissolution of all classes, nationalities, etc., within present society". (page 69, International Publishers, 1960) Across the globe the masses of propertyless are growing and beginning to enter into battle against international capital. The only hope for survival this revolutionary class has is to fight for political power so that a new economic system based on distribution according to need can be built.

Objective conditions are leading to a change in the forms of struggle of the working class. The doctrine for today is developing within the political arena where the working class fights the state apparatus to have its basic needs met. Class-based movements are emerging that call for the basic necessities of life - food, shelter, health care, clean water, etc. - to be provided by the state, since there are increasingly fewer employers to provide the wages to buy them. We are seeing the contours of a revolutionary movement different from one in which the centers of the class struggle were at the workplace. These recently economically dispossessed workers are quite destitute and have very little to lose. It is the demands for the basic necessities that workers have in common that can unite the movement for revolutionary transformation. Today revolutionaries need to participate in activities that bring together those impacted by the effects of poverty and economic insecurity across those factors used by the ruling class to divide us, like color, ethnicity, gender, etc. The objective social motion today is emphasizing the fight for the unity of the poor, around what workers have in common. Understanding these new conditions and developing the doctrine for this period is a key task of revolutionaries today.

The Working Class Political Party

Doctrine also has an organizational expression. Many revolutionaries today continue to see the role of revolutionaries and of revolutionary organizations through the lens of the Leninist period. During Lenin's time there were two classes that could lead the development of industrialization in the primarily agricultural countries, the bourgeoisie and the industrial working class. There were two forms of social organization to facilitate the industrialization of the various countries. The first form was the development of capitalist private property that emerged from private property based in agricultural production. The extreme exploitation and oppression of this form was revealed in the early days of industrialization in England and the period of capitalist slavery in the South in the United States.

With the maturing of Marxism, revolutionaries advocated for the working class to lead the social development of society from agricultural production to an industrialized society. The content of this historical period was the development from agricultural to industrial society. All the 20th century communist revolutions were fights to industrialize agricultural countries. Thus we see two forms of industrialized societies: capitalism led by the capitalist class based on the exploitation of the working class and socialism led by the working class with society organized under favorable conditions for the majority of the population.

The features of the Leninist party were to guarantee that the bourgeoisie did not gain supremacy in this revolutionary transformation. Today there is only one path forward for society, the development of a communist economic foundation for society. Every other attempted path will lead to continued instability and crisis. Objective conditions will continually push society in the direction of communism. However, without the understanding that the goal of the revolutionary struggle is to win political power and establish a communist economic foundation for society, the struggle against the conditions of the crisis of capitalism will not succeed. These different conditions are the basis for the new political party of the revolutionary class.

A political party by definition is an organization that has the goal of achieving or maintaining political power. Thus for the our class to win political power it must

have its own political party. In the past political parties have put forward a program that separated it and differentiated it from other organizations. Today, the objective conditions are demanding that the working class fight for the basic necessities of life that can only be satisfied by a communist organization of society and distribution according to need. Therefore, the revolutionary party must not put forward any program that is distinct from the program of the revolutionary class. The struggle to understand this is critical.

Revolutionaries need to grapple with the meaning of the quote that opens up Section II, Proletarians and Communists in the Communist Manifesto:

“In what relation do the Communists stand to the proletarians as a whole?

“The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working class parties.

“They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mold the proletarian movement.”

However, this does not mean that revolutionaries sit back and wait for the working class to formulate its program. So long as the class struggle remains diffuse and sporadic, little can be accomplished. Revolutionaries within the class struggle must participate and assist in formulating “programmatically agitation” and strategy and tactics for the revolutionary process under these changed conditions.

The revolutionary political party can only be built on the basis of the doctrine and strategy for the struggle today as the central foundation of the party. Of course this understanding is developed based on the science of society. However, a party based primarily on the general principles of Marxism will always remain a party of abstractions that will be isolated from the revolutionary struggles. The actual social activity of the revolutionary class must be the leading factor.

In the past, during a period of relative class peace it was impossible to develop the kind of party needed for the current period. Today, as the objective revolutionary struggle is beginning to grow, the conscious revolutionaries are charged with the possibility and necessity of building the revolutionary party of the working class.